



February 11, 2009

"Preparing today's students to  
succeed in tomorrow's world"

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Honorable Kim G. Dunning  
Presiding Judge of the Superior Court  
700 Civic Center Drive West  
Santa Ana, California 92701

Dear Judge Dunning:

In accordance with California Penal Code sections 933 and 933.05, this letter is in response to the 2007-2008 Orange County Grand Jury Report entitled *Are Charter Schools Getting Passing Grades?*"

**Findings**

Finding F-1: *Orange County charter schools meet the intent of the Education Code 47600-47664 by providing parents and pupils a choice in educational opportunities, emphasizing specific learning experiences, and aiding at-risk or academically low-achieving students.*

Response: The Saddleback Valley Unified School District agrees with this finding. Ralph A. Gates Elementary School, the charter school within our District, offers a unique two-way language immersion program which produces positive learning outcomes for all learners, including students who demographically would be classified as at-risk and potentially low-achieving students, specifically students who are English language learners.

Finding F-2: *The number of charter schools in Orange County is not growing commensurate with the overall growth of charter schools in California.*

Response: The Saddleback Valley Unified School District has no evidence that refutes this finding, therefore the District agrees with this finding. Declining enrollment, a current condition in our District and many others in Orange County, may be a factor affecting the growth of charter schools within the County.

Finding F-3: *The Orange County school districts' oversight costs, in some districts, exceed the authorized 1% reimbursement.*

Response: The Saddleback Valley Unified School District agrees with the finding. The oversight costs for Ralph A. Gates Elementary School exceed the authorized 1% reimbursement.

**SADDLEBACK VALLEY  
UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT**

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**Recommendations**

Recommendation R-1: *Orange County school districts and Orange County Superintendent of Schools continue to offer expanded choices for educational opportunities, as required in the State Education Code, by utilizing charter schools as an option to provide additional choices, especially for at-risk and academically low-achieving students.*

Response: The Saddleback Valley Unified School District agrees with this recommendation. Choices of educational opportunities are offered through a variety of District programs, including the two-way language immersion program offered at Ralph A. Gates Elementary School.

Recommendation R-2: *The chartering authorities should follow the intent of the legislature by encouraging the establishment of charter schools by granting more charter school petitions provided they meet the State requirements.*

Response: The Saddleback Valley Unified School District agrees with this recommendation. The District evaluates each charter petition utilizing the criteria provided in state law, regulations and case law. Charter school petitions that meet all of the state requirements are accepted by the Board of Education.

Recommendation R-3: *Local school districts provide adequate oversight of charter schools even though State law does not allow for full reimbursement for oversight.*

Response: The Saddleback Valley Unified School District agrees with this recommendation. District staff works closely and cooperatively with the staff at Ralph A. Gates Elementary School to support the unique aspects of the charter school program as well as those aspects of the program that are consistent with the general education program in the District.

A copy of this response will be mailed separately to the Orange County Grand Jury.

Sincerely,



Steven L. Fish, Ed.D.  
Superintendent

C: Orange County Grand Jury